

Short Stories that Interest

AUNT BURNS' AID

SUPPOSE that we'll have to invite Aunt Burns," pouted Amy. "She is a sort of aunt to Nell, too—I guess she must be an aunt to half the town." Then she added with a sudden vehemence, "I'm tired of seeing the pesty thing sitting at the table and insisting on hearing everything that is said. The ancients used to be liked at the banquet board, but I'll guarantee they never invited a living skeleton to their feast."

"Amy!" cried Mrs. Woolsey reprovingly. "You should not make such remarks about your aunt Burns."

"I don't suppose that I should," agreed Amy unrepentantly. "But when the old tramp insists upon being a part of every party at her age, I don't care if I do have 'expectations' from her. She's a nuisance. Anyhow, she's likely to get mad and leave her money to a home for indigent cats with four legs or two."

"Amy! I forbid such indecorous remarks," cried the shocked Mrs. Woolsey, and Amy, detecting the danger note in the usually placid voice, ceased to murmur loudly and contented herself with saying hateful things about aunt Burns in a whisper.

Miss Mehtabel was deserving of many of the things that were said. She had all of the Burns money to dispose of as she pleased, and not only her relatives but her friends spoiled the old lady. In the hope that a share would come to them.

Almost totally deaf, she insisted upon attending social functions, to everything from birthdays to burials that happened in Center Valley was marred by her shrill demands to know what was being said.

Amy had determined—but all in vain—to take a stand against the presence of Miss Burns at the party she was giving for Nell Borden. Nell had spent the autumn with her, and Dick Decker had her promise that in the spring she would come back to Center Valley and live. The party was to be both a temporary farewell and an announcement party, and Amy did not want it spoiled by Aunt Burns' shrill questionings.

She had thought she could purchase a new dress and take it to the Mehtabel of the flat, but Mrs. Woolsey would not hear of such a thing, and Miss Mehtabel was the first of the guests to arrive, fearful that she might miss some of the excitement.

There was more than a hint of the real purpose of the party, and Nell was the object of interest to all except Aunt Burns, who sat in a corner

and contentedly regarded her pretty greatniece.

She was remarkably quiet—for Aunt Burns—and when supper was



AUNT BURNS AND AMY.

announced Amy in gratitude patted the redlike arm affectionately as she led aunt Burns to her place near the head of the table, where the inquisitive old lady could hear the announce-

ment that was to be made.

Even excitement could not dull appetite in Center Valley, and it was some time before Mrs. Woolsey rose.

Even this expedient did not seem to prove efficacious, for presently Mrs. Woolsey's speech was interrupted by a shrill request from aunt Burns to know what was being said.

"Mother is saying that we are all sorry to have Nell Borden go home," shouted Amy, who sat beside Miss Mehtabel.

"To be sure," agreed aunt Burns. "We are all sorry to have her go. She is a nice and attentive young woman, and I am sure that there is some young man in Boston who will be very glad to see her again."

She beamed kindly upon the embarrassed Nell Borden, and the others guessing what was to come looked at Dick Decker and smiled teasingly.

Mrs. Woolsey raised her voice slightly and went on with her remarks devotedly hoping that Aunt Burns would not interrupt again, but Aunt Burns had had one of her bad days and presently the speaking stopped while Amy shouted to Miss Mehtabel a brief synopsis of the later remarks.

"Mother is saying that she hopes that Nell will come again and make a longer stay," she screamed, while the others glanced at each other and wondered what break Miss Burns would make next. "Mother says she knows that Nell will be welcome whenever she comes."

"To be sure," admitted Aunt Burns, "but I suppose she will find

Boston too gay to want to come back soon and I suppose there's that young man there who won't want to let her come."

In view of the anticipated announcement Aunt Burns' remark was doubly funny and the other guests roared their approval. Aunt Burns accepted this as a mischievous tribute to her pleasant and she beamed her satisfaction while Mrs. Woolsey cut short her little speech and hurried to announce the engagement and add that Nell would become a daughter of Center Valley in the spring.

The handclapping and the buzz of congratulatory comments roused Aunt Burns to a fresh demand for news and Amy shouted the information.

"So it's Nell Borden who is going to be married!" cried Aunt Burns. "I thought that Jim Tetlow had spoken to you at last. No, you needn't try to shut me up, Martha Woolsey. It's high time that the young man spoke up or else stepped aside and gave some one else a chance. In my day young men did not shilly-shally year after year in this fashion."

"I'm willing to speak if Amy will listen," shouted Tetlow, coming to his own defense. "I've been trying for more than a year to get her to listen to me, but every time I turn serious she runs away and won't listen. It's not my fault we are not engaged."

"That's the way to talk," cried Aunt Burns beamingly. "You shall have Aunt Mary Burns' house to live in. I always meant to give that to the first of my nieces to get married."

"But she hasn't said she would marry me," reminded Tetlow with the full power of his lungs. "I've asked her, but I haven't her answer."

Aunt Burns regarded her niece sternly and with crimson face Amy nodded her assent.

It was late before they left and Jim and Amy stood in the doorway watching Aunt Burns plop down the road, under the escort of her hired man.

"I wonder how much she heard and how much she pretended not to hear," mused Amy, who was not unacquainted with the fact that Aunt Burns sometimes abused the privileges of her afflictions.

"I wonder," echoed Jim, offering a fervent silent prayer that no one would ever learn that he had enlisted the kind offices of Aunt Burns, with whom he was a great favorite.

Aunt Burns, hurrying over the frozen ground, nodded her head vigorously.

"That's the right sort of young man," she declared to herself. "He has the right spirit. In my day girls were only too glad to listen. I found a way to make Amy give an answer."

Antique Collectors

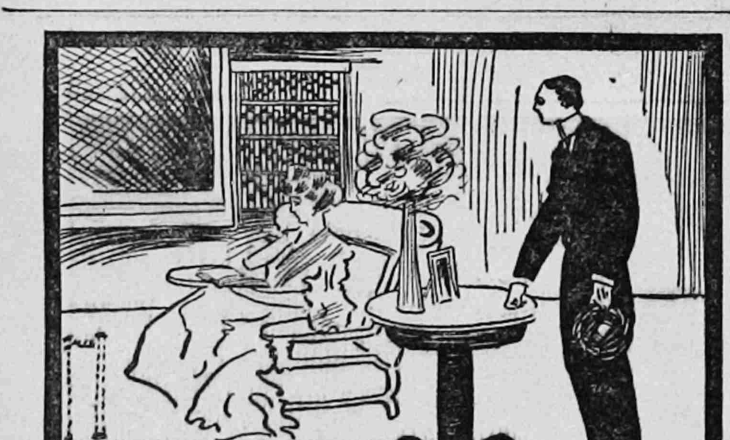
HIS is one of the most beautiful spots I have ever visited," said Grace as she rocked idly in her chair. "The man who conceived the idea of building a hotel here should have a monument raised to his memory."

"Rather say that he should be permitted to live here forever," suggested Smithson lazily. "Why put him under the sod so quickly?"

"I meant when he dies, of course," amended Miss Hargreaves.

She smiled brightly into the other's eyes, and for the hundredth time that afternoon Smithson caught himself wondering why he had never realized before what a charming girl Grace Hargreaves was.

He had known her for years, but



"YOU MEAN THAT—THAT YOU CARE FOR ME?" HE ASKED.

it was not until they found themselves among the first guests of the new hotel in the Westchester region of New Brunswick that he had had his attention particularly drawn to her. The hotel had only been open two weeks, and guests were still few.

"How did you find the place?" he suddenly demanded.

"I wanted a new place," she explained. "Some men who hunted through here last year told her about the hotel that was being built and she insisted upon coming."

"I am here for old furniture," he volunteered. "There are all sorts of old pieces to be picked up for a song. Their beauty lies in their genuineness; old bits brought out generations ago and used by their present owners, who cast longing glances at the painted woods in the shops at Dalhousie."

Grace gave a little scream of delight. "Do you mean to say that there are really places where you can still pick up old furniture?" she asked eagerly. "If I had only known! I shall have to telegraph for more money. Old furniture is a passion with me."

Smithson smiled, then smiled. He had hoped to have the rich field to himself, but second thoughts rather approved of so fair a rival.

"Suppose we pool issues?" he suggested. "In that way we shall not bid against each other and raise the prices. I'll buy it all up and when we get back to town in the fall we will have a division."

Grace nodded her assent, and after being pledged to secrecy lest others learn of their plans, she ran off to confide her secrets to her mother.

Smithson hired a team for a month and daily the three fared forth in search of treasure trove. The others at the hotel wondered at the long drives upon which Mrs. Hargreaves and her daughter went under Smithson's guidance, but none of the furniture they picked up was brought to the hotel, and the nine-day wonder soon dropped.

Smithson picked up some bargains and had them all shipped to his town house. Before his vacation time was over he had skinned the cream of the colonial collections in a 10-mile radius, but even the anticipation of unpacking his treasures did not console him for the fact that Mrs. Hargreaves had elected to remain for another month.

The long delightful drives behind

rather discouraging. "You want to present 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' at the opera house?" said the sheriff of Bacon Ridge. "Why, that plumed show was here a month ago."

"That so?" responded the advance agent in the blue vest.

"Yes, stranger, and the dogs chased Lizzy."

"They always do that, sir."

"Then the dog catchers chased the dogs."

"Ah, that was an added feature."

"And old Mrs. Wiggs chased Little Eva for winking at her husband as he sat in the front row."

"Rather startling, I assure you."

"And old Bill Jones, who runs the Eagle house, chased Uncle Tom for a

THE FIRST TIME

I was after dinner. The young man who had not been married very long sunk down into his brand new Morris chair with a sign of comfort. He had on his brand new smoking jacket and his brand new house slippers and as he gazed at his wife in her pretty and also brand new gown he felt very well pleased with himself and with life.

"That was a dandy dinner, dear," he remarked.

He was a little surprised that the compliment did not draw her to his side as such remarks usually did. She remained sitting in the weathered oak rocker and looked up absently from her embroidery.

"Was it?" she inquired.

"Fine!" said the young man, with tremendous enthusiasm. He did not tremble unduly why, but he felt an impulse to be blithe and emphatic. He felt there was something in the air.

"I'm glad you liked it," said his wife.

The young married man coughed and picked up the newspaper. For five minutes he read the advertisements upside down, frowning. He was thinking that Mabel certainly did not act as usual. Perhaps she did not feel well.

"Have you a headache?" he asked, anxiously.

The young woman in the weathered oak rocker gave him a brief but not a fag glance. "I feel very well, thank

you," she said, politely.

"I'm glad," he said, a little blankly. "I just thought I'd ask."

Over the edge of the paper he sent inquiring glances at her. He had never noticed it before, but when she looked down as she was doing now, Mabel's profile certainly was severe. Perhaps it was because he was used to seeing her laugh. Now that he thought of it she hadn't laughed all during dinner. He wondered why.

"Were you alone all day?" he asked, diplomatically. "Were you lonely?"

"Three of the girls were here all afternoon," said his wife. "We had a very good time. No, I was not lonely."

"Well—what—has anything gone wrong?" asked the young married man.

"Oh, dear, no!" said his wife, with polite carelessness. "Why, what could go wrong?"

"I don't know," said her husband. "I thought something might. Things do sometimes go wrong. I thought you seemed so quiet."

"Oh, I?" asked his wife, turning her embroidery about.

The young married man held his head. A horrible feeling of helplessness was stealing over him. He wondered with a sort of chill if this was a natural thing or not to be expected. Maybe Mabel had grown tired of him already. Perhaps it was the usual thing to have one's wife grow cold and abstracted after a few weeks. But a whole lifetime of it!

The young married man made a great fuss over getting a cigar and

lighting it, wandering around the room as he did so. When he passed Mabel he touched her hair lightly as he had a way of doing, but no answering upturned face resulted. Maybe she did not notice it, he concluded, for the touch was very light.

"I saw Billy Hamiltons today," he began briskly, as he sat down again.

"Did you?" said his wife.

"He told me a big piece of news," he went on, her husband desperately.

"Did he?" said his wife.

"See here," said the young married man hurriedly, "what's the matter, Mabel?"

"Nothing is the matter," said his wife.

"Yes, there is!" protested her husband. His tone was tinged with alarm. "Tell me what it is!"

"I'm surprised," said his wife with her chin still higher, "that you should even ask me to tell you."

"Why, Mabel?"

"Yes, I am! You—you've shown plainly enough—well, never mind!"

"Now, Mabel!" cried the young married man standing anxiously before her, "tell me instantly what's wrong! What have I done?"

"You—you forgot to kiss me when you came home tonight for the first time since we were married!" sobbed his wife, dropping the embroidery and hunting her handkerchief, and never once said you still loved me. I think that's enough!"

"Great guns!" said the young married man, smiling and relievedly. "I believe I did forget that. What a villain I am!"

He Broke the Ice

HE little group of skaters paused to look at Alice Brainerd came out upon the ice. More than one of the young men proceeded to give an exhibition of fancy skating in the hope of attracting her attention, but Miss Brainerd struck out with long swinging strokes and apparently did not perceive that there was anyone else upon the ice.

It was this very exclusiveness which made Miss Brainerd so attractive. She had come to Cosgrove only three weeks before when her father took charge of the railroad shops, and she had met few persons. One or two of the girls had called and reported that she was charming, but the young men had found it difficult to make

presently he was lying on the sound trying to reach the girl's hands.

In her terror she called him toward her and he felt the ice give beneath his weight and then came the chilling submersion in the icy water.

As Ben felt himself going he struck out for the girl and caught her by the shoulders, supporting her in an effort to make his way to the sound ice.

She threw her arms convulsively about his neck and it was with difficulty that he could prevent them both from being drawn under the ice.

The water was freezing cold and his hands were soon numb, while the skin was cut and bleeding from their contact with the rough edges of the ice. He felt that he could not hold out much longer. His strength was failing fast and presently his frozen limbs would refuse to answer to his will and they must slip into the black

gulf that seemed to yawn for them.

"I hear some one coming," murmured the girl. "Can you hold out a few minutes longer?"

"I must," he answered grimly. "Are the people near?"

The girl turned her head. "There is one old man coming out from shore with a board. The others are skating."

"I'll hold on somehow," assured Ben, his teeth chattering so that he could scarcely make himself understood. "What is the old man yelling?"

"He says to stand up," answered the girl. "I wonder what he means."

Ben savored the thought that he had out much longer," he said. "Do you think you can hold on now until they come? You are—"

As he had been speaking his body had gradually been sinking in the water and now he gave a shout, for his knees had touched bottom and presently he was standing upon his feet and was raising the girl.

Then a board was pushed toward them and on this Miss Brainerd, and afterward Ben, were drawn to firm ice.

"I guess you're new to these parts," commented the grinning rescuer. "Everybody knows the sunken island. It's a ledge of rock right down the middle of the river. Deep water is on either side."

With the sinking heart Ben followed Miss Brainerd and the farmer toward the latter's home, the most available place of refuge. After all his heroism had been turned to farce. He had fought for 10 minutes to keep the girl and himself above the surface when all the time they had needed only to stand up to be entirely safe.

Already he could hear the peering remarks and could imagine what the result would be.

It was an hour later that he and Miss Brainerd met again in the farmhouse kitchen beside the roaring stove. Both were in night garments while their own were being dried.

"It was very brave," said the girl softly. "You did not know that there was no danger and it was just as though the water was as deep as the ocean."

"So long as you feel that way I don't care what the rest say," declared Ben jubilantly, and as he looked into the sweet blue eyes he read there a sweeter message than that and was well content.

MISS BRAINERD STRUCK OUT FOR HERSELF.

her acquaintance.

There had been no social event at which she could be generally introduced, and so, as she skated up the river, she was all alone.

Ben Turner looked after the trim little figure with longing eyes. He was a comparative stranger himself, for he had come only a month before to work in the drafting department at the shop. He had begged an afternoon off to take advantage of the first good skating of the season, and he was enjoying it to the full until Alice Brainerd had come upon the ice.

Ben had seen her once or twice, and from the first there had been no other girl in the world for him. He would probably make her acquaintance in time, but he grudgingly every day that intervened and he wished that he might skate after her and inquire himself as one of her father's staff.

It was with this half-formed intention that he skated slowly after the girl, following past the bend of the river, where they were lost to sight by most of the skaters.

He had just passed the bend when he heard an ominous cracking and then a woman's scream, shrill and terrified.

A quarter of a mile beyond there was a dark spot on the glare of ice and in the black water he could see a woman's face white and agonized, and Desperately Ben pushed ahead and

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Ha! Ha! Have a Laugh

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"And old Bill Jones, who runs the Eagle house, chased Uncle Tom for a

board bill."

"Great Brutus!"

"And then the boys got together and chased the whole blamed show out of town. Better present some other show, plister."

No Great Loss. He had just been introduced to the widow of a man who had married for money.

"What kind of a man was the late lamented?" he asked.

"Well," was the suggestive reply, "he was just an expense."

Or Better Than Some. Tom—"This paper tells of a spinner in Vermont who is quarrying stone like a man."

Jack—"Well, I suppose she thinks a stone man is better than none."

Full of Scratches. "What has this man been doing, sergeant?" gasped Officer O'Toole, as he rolled over and over the sidewalk with his curly prisoner.

"Hold on to him," shouted Sergeant Baumgarten, as he sent in the call for the wagon. "He was a fence."

Officer O'Toole took a deep breath. "A fence is it?" he blurted. "Bedad, from 't' looks av me hands he must be a barbwolfe fence."

Before and After. Green—"All men are equal before

the law."

Blawn—"Yes, but after it they are not!"

Discovery of a Dyspeptic. Growells—"I discovered a hired assassin in our house this morning."

Howells—"You don't say?"

Growells—"Fact. My wife advertised for a cook and she got the job."

Inspiration. Little Willie—"Say, pa, what is an inspiration?"

Pa—"An inspiration, my son, is the sudden recollection of some one who will probably stand for a touch."

Theatrical woman," said Singleton.

"Theatrical woman?" exclaimed Weddlerly. "Say, did you ever see one that wasn't?"

He Was Interested. Landlady (reading)—"I see that Skimmer, the grocer is advertising something new in coffee pots."

Old Boarder—"What is it—good coffee?"

Killing Time. Old Father Time looked "all in."

"Why is it you always look so bad in the summer?" asked the friend.

Father Time sighed.

"It is because so many people kill me during the summer months," he responded feebly.